

07-21-04

MILITARY HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004

HON. DAVID R. OBEY

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 21, 2004

Mr. Speaker, we are not legislating here today. We are engaging in a giant game of charades. Let me explain. The gentleman who just spoke, the gentleman from Florida, is the senior Republican on the Committee on Appropriations. I am the senior Democrat on the Committee on Appropriations. We are absolutely as one on this issue. I totally agree with everything the gentleman just said. What I would like to do is to repeat what he said in a slightly different way to drive home the point that he was making.

What has happened, Mr. Speaker, is that the Committee on Appropriations brought to this floor earlier today the military construction bill which contained a provision which enabled us to improve military housing for thousands of young military families who are sacrificing more than anybody else in this country because of the Iraq war.

When we did that, the chairman of the Committee on the Budget made known his unhappiness with that action because it technically breached the previous budget resolution which the Committee on the Budget had pushed through this House on an earlier date. So the chairman of the Committee on the Budget made known his intent to eliminate that provision by making a point of order against it when it was before the House. That meant that that action would effectively deny that improved military housing to somewhere between 23,000 and 50,000 additional military families.

So now what is happening is this. Because evidently some people are uncomfortable with their being politically exposed on that issue, we now have seen the authorizing committee ask to bring this bill to the floor which purports to accomplish the very same thing that was accomplished by the appropriations committee. The only reason that this is allowable under House rules and the appropriations bill was not is because the gentleman's ability to make a point of order lies only on a bill which has been reported from a committee. This provision that is

before us was never considered by the committee and so, therefore, it is exempt. So it is a procedural loophole which is being used by the Committee on the Budget in order to force this House to go through this outrageous charade, and the net result is what?

The result will be that the bill now before us will not pass. We have absolutely no guarantee whatsoever that it will be passed in the Senate. So this is probably on a short track to nowhere. Meanwhile, the one bill that we know will pass, the military appropriations bill, will now fall victim to a point of order that will be lodged by the gentleman from Iowa. The result is the only vehicle which is guaranteed to pass will no longer contain the provision helping military families. A vehicle which is not going to go anywhere will contain that provision that does not help anyone.

The bill that is before us today is not a substantive fix. It is a political fix. It takes care of a few people's political problems, but it does not solve the problem of the military families. This is an outrageous charade. I welcome the action of the gentleman from California and the gentleman from Missouri in at least trying to do what they can to help these military families get the housing assistance they need, but we would not have had to go through this if we had simply allowed the Committee on Appropriations to proceed with its bill; and even though we are allowing this committee to take this action today, there is no guarantee whatsoever that this action will produce one additional decent house for a military person in this country. The only guarantee is to vote for the military construction bill with that provision.

Right now this entire issue is in the hands of the gentleman from Iowa. If he wants to effectively deny military families that decent housing, he will proceed to object to the provision in the military construction bill. I do not think we are going to fool anybody with the charade that is being participated in by bringing this bill to the floor.

